

During the Middle Ages, the church assumed much responsibility for helping the poor. Religious groups operated hospitals, orphanages, and poorhouses. Merchant and craft guilds also aided the poor, especially members and their families in need.

The 1600's to the 1800's. In 1601, the English Parliament passed the Act for the Relief of the Poor. This act, known as the *Elizabethan Poor Law*, made the local government units called *parishes* responsible for their own poor. The law provided for taxing parishioners to support the needy in each parish.

Most localities maintained poorhouses, also called *almshouses* or *workhouses*, which not only housed poor people, but also put them to work. One goal of these institutions was to get enough work out of the residents to pay for the cost of supporting them. Few poorhouses succeeded in paying for themselves. The conditions in most of them were dreadful enough to discourage the poor from seeking help.

In the United States, early welfare laws resembled those of Great Britain. By the early 1900's, many states required cities and counties to aid the aged, the blind, and fatherless children. Some state governments helped pay the costs of this aid.

The federal government did not become active in assisting the poor until the Great Depression of the 1930's. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), established in 1933, gave funds to the states to relieve the hardships caused by unemployment. The FERA required each state to have an agency that either took charge of a state welfare program or supervised local programs.

In 1935, Congress approved the social security system, which replaced the FERA. The Social Security Act has been amended many times, but it still provides the framework for federal welfare programs in the United States.

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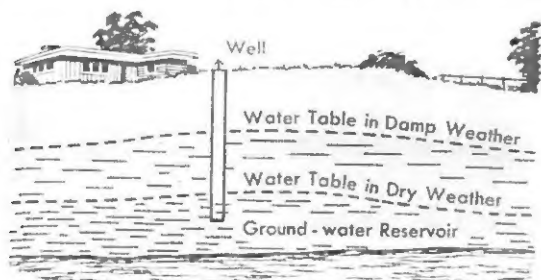
Aid to Families with Dependent Children	Poverty
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	Workers' Compensation

WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS. See CARE; CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, UNITED STATES; FAMILY SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA; JEWISH WELFARE BOARD, NATIONAL; PUBLIC WELFARE ASSOCIATION, AMERICAN; SERVICE CLUB.

WELFARE STATE is a term sometimes applied to a country in which the government assumes major responsibility for the social welfare of its people.

WELFARE WORK. See SOCIAL WORK.

The Depth of a Water Well depends on the level of the water table. A well must be deep enough to reach water in dry weather.



WELL is a hole in the earth from which a fluid is withdrawn. Water wells are the most common type. Oil and natural-gas wells are also common. Mining companies also use wells to remove salt and sulfur from deep in the ground. They pump down steam or hot water to remove these materials.

Water Wells. The underground water that flows into wells is called *ground water* (see GROUND WATER). This water comes from rain that soaks into the ground and slowly moves down to the *ground water reservoir*, an area of soil and rock saturated with water. The top of this zone is the *water table*, the level at which water stands in a well that is not being pumped.

In damp places, the water table may lie just below the surface. It is easily reached by digging. A dug well is usually lined with bricks, stone, or porous concrete, to keep the sides from caving in. In drier places, the water table may be hundreds of feet or meters down. It may then be necessary to drill the well and sink pipes. Power-driven pumps usually are used to draw the water out of deep wells.

In some areas, underground water moving down from the slopes of hills and mountains becomes trapped under watertight layers of clay or shale. Wells drilled through these layers in valleys and plains run into water under pressure. In such wells, called *flowing artesian wells*, the pressure may be strong enough to make water flow without pumping. See ARTESIAN WELL.

Many persons still depend on wells for their water supply, especially in rural areas. Many cities also get

A Properly Built Well has brick sides that reach to the water table. Below this, a lining of loose stones and gravel allows water to seep in. A tight cover keeps out contaminated surface water.

